

2016 Idaho Winery of the Year: Telaya Wine Co.

By Eric Degerman, March 14, 2016



Telaya Wine Co., owned and operated by Earl and Carrie Sullivan.

KATHERINE JONES — *Idaho Statesman*

GARDEN CITY, Idaho — It's unprecedented to go from "winery to watch" to "winery of the year" within 12 months, but that's an indication of how successful Earl and Carrie Sullivan have been with Telaya Wine Co.

"We say that we're having fun making serious wine, and that's the goal," he said inside Telaya's new 12,000-square-foot winery and tasting room alongside the Boise River.

Last year, the Gem State's 2016 Winery of the Year racked up a number of gold medals along the West Coast. The Telaya 2012 Syrah received a double gold and 2012 Viognier a gold medal both at the Seattle Wine Awards. The 2013 Turas — a Syrah-based blend from the Snake River Valley, earned a gold at the Idaho Wine Competition.

Arguably the Sullivans' top wine was their 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon. It won the Chairman's Award at the Riverside (Calif.) International Wine Competition, a gold in Seattle and a coveted double platinum in Wine Press Northwest's year-end Platinum Judging. That Cab comes from Scooteneys Flats Vineyard on Red Mountain in Washington.

"It's always great to get critical acclaim, but the best acclaim is the customer coming in and saying, 'I really love the experience and I'd love to come back,'" he said.

In the past, the Sullivans have taken some arrows from other Idaho winemakers for using fruit from beyond the state. However, the killing freeze of November 2014 that clipped vine production in 2015 led a number of Idaho wineries to follow Sullivan into Washington for grapes.

"We've always had the vision of making the best possible wine that we can make," he said. "It starts with the best fruit, and we just don't have enough fruit in Idaho for all of us to make great wine. Other winemakers were here first. They have contracts, and they have taken up a big chunk of the fruit. As things come up in Idaho, we try to get involved and make it happen."

Any winemaker in Washington, much less Idaho, would relish the chance to work with vineyards Sullivan has gotten into — sites such as Boushey, Champoux, Quintessence on Red Mountain and Damon LaLonde-managed French Creek and Scooteneys Flats.

"Dick Boushey, I love that guy to death, and he and his wife, Luanne, just bend over backward for us," Sullivan said. "And Damon farms great fruit, too."

Eight years ago, Telaya began with 50 cases from the 2008 vintage and a word the Sullivans created to reference two places with special meanings — the Tetons and playa — Spanish for "beach."

IDAHO WINE
COMMISSION

WWW.IDAHOWINES.ORG | 821 W STATE STREET, BOISE ID 83702 | 208-332-1538 | INFO@IDAHOWINES.ORG



The Sullivans now own a 5,000-case vinification facility with working space for close friend/renter Leslie Preston's Coiled Wines. The facility includes a catering kitchen, conference room and patio with a firepit that's a stone's throw from the Boise River and Greenbelt bike path. Across the parking lot is the Riverside Hotel, a 330-room property being renovated by local ownership.

"It's a great avenue for people to become familiar with Idaho wine as they travel here and walk right next door to our winery," Sullivan said.

The financial risk is substantial. Earl worked on the family farm in Kentucky and met Carrie at college on his way to a career in pharmaceuticals and hers as a veterinary surgeon.

Fifteen years ago, they moved to Boise and put down roots. As the wine industry developed around the state capital, thanks in large part to Cinder's Melanie Krause, the Sullivans saw potential. After several years of renting winery space from Cinder, they spotted an opportunity to create a tasting room nearby but unlike anything in the Pacific Northwest.

"If we can get people walking or riding down the Greenbelt to take notice, hopefully they'll say, 'OK, I'm going to give Idaho wine a shot,'" Earl said. "We need to educate people on Idaho wine, on Telaya wine and on hospitality."

In a year, guests will get to enjoy a Rhône-inspired rosé made by Carrie, the first for Telaya.

"I am very proud of Earl and Carrie," said Moya Dolsby, executive director for the Idaho Wine Commission. "Their passion and drive is infectious. It has allowed them to build a beautiful winery, have hundreds of wine club members and sell out of their wine. Idaho is lucky to have them."

And yet, the ultimate goal for the Sullivans is to see Telaya grow into a family business with sons Jack and Ty.

"Part of the vision we had was them coming down to the winery and spending time here with us doing what we love to do," Earl said. "The other night, Ty spent three hours on the forklift with me. It was part of a long day working, but I got to spend some time with my boys, which is great."

